

AMERICAN LANGUAGES,

AND WHY WE SHOULD STUDY THEM.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
MARCH 9, 1885,

BY

DANIEL G. BRINTON, M.D.,

PROFESSOR OF ETHNOLOGY AND ARCHÆOLOGY AT THE ACADEMY OF NATURAL SCIENCES,
PHILADELPHIA.

REPRINTED FROM THE
PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY.

PRINTED BY
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA.
1885.

PM107
.B7

208254

74

51

AMERICAN LANGUAGES, AND WHY WE SHOULD STUDY THEM.

MR. PRESIDENT, ETC. :

I appear before you to-night to enter a plea for one of the most neglected branches of learning, for a study usually considered hopelessly dry and unproductive,—that of American aboriginal languages.

It might be thought that such a topic, in America and among Americans, would attract a reasonably large number of students. The interest which attaches to our native soil and to the homes of our ancestors—an interest which it is the praiseworthy purpose of this Society to inculcate and cherish—this interest might be supposed to extend to the languages of those nations who for uncounted generations possessed the land which we have occupied relatively so short a time.

This supposition would seem the more reasonable in view of the fact that in one sense these languages have not died out among us. True, they are no longer media of intercourse, but they survive in thousands of geographical names all over our land. In the State of Connecticut alone there are over six hundred, and even more in Pennsylvania.

Certainly it would be a most legitimate anxiety which should direct itself to the preservation of the correct forms and precise meanings of these numerous and peculiarly national designations. One would think that this alone would not fail to excite something more than a languid curiosity in American linguistics, at least in our institutions of learning and societies for historical research.

Such a motive applies to the future as well as to the past. We have yet thousands of names to affix to localities, ships,

cars, country-seats, and the like. Why should we fall back on the dreary repetition of the Old World nomenclature? I turn to a Gazetteer of the United States, and I find the name Athens repeated 34 times to as many villages and towns in our land, Rome and Palmyra each 29 times, Troy 58 times, not to speak of Washington, which is entered for 331 different places in this Gazetteer!

What poverty of invention does this manifest!

Evidently the forefathers of our christened West were, like Sir John Falstaff, at a loss where a commodity of good names was to be had.

Yet it lay immediately at their hands. The native tongues supply an inexhaustible store of sonorous, appropriate, and unused names. As has well been said by an earlier writer, "No class of terms could be applied more expressive and more American. The titles of the Old World certainly need not be copied, when those that are fresh and fragrant with our natal soil await adoption."¹

That this study has received so slight attention I attribute to the comparatively recent understanding of the value of the study of languages in general, and more particularly to the fact that no one, so far as I know, has set forth the purposes for which we should investigate these tongues, and the results which we expect to reach by means of them. This it is my present purpose to attempt, so far as it can be accomplished in the scope of an evening address.

The time has not long passed when the only good reasons for studying a language were held to be either that we might thereby acquaint ourselves with its literature; or that certain business, trading, or political interests might be subserved; or that the nation speaking it might be made acquainted with the blessings of civilization and Christianity. These were all good and sufficient reasons, but I cannot adduce any one of them in support of my plea to-night; for the languages I shall speak of have no literature; all transactions with their people can be carried on as well or better in European tongues; and, in fact, many of these people are

¹ H. R. Schoolcraft.

no longer in existence. They have died out or amalgamated with others. What I have to argue for is the study of the dead languages of extinct and barbarous tribes.

You will readily see that my arguments must be drawn from other considerations than those of immediate utility. I must seek them in the broader fields of ethnology and philosophy; I must appeal to your interest in man as a race, as a member of a common species, as possessing in all his families and tribes the same mind, the same soul. It was the proud prerogative of Christianity first to proclaim this great truth, to break down the distinctions of race and the prejudices of nationalities, in order to erect upon their ruins that catholic temple of universal brotherhood which excludes no man as a stranger or an alien. After eighteen hundred years of labor, science has reached that point which the religious instinct divined, and it is in the name of science that I claim for these neglected monuments of man's powers that attention which they deserve.

Anthropology is the science which studies man as a species; *Ethnology*, that which studies the various nations which make up the species. To both of these the science of Linguistics is more and more perceived to be a powerful, an indispensable auxiliary. Through it we get nearer to the real man, his inner self, than by any other avenue of approach, and it needs no argument to show that nothing more closely binds men into a social unit than a common language. Without it, indeed, there can be no true national unity. The affinities of speech, properly analyzed and valued, are our most trustworthy guides in tracing the relationship and descent of nations.

If this is true in general, it is particularly so in the ethnology of America. Language is almost our only clue to discover the kinship of those countless scattered hordes who roamed the forests of this broad continent. Their traditions are vague or lost, written records they had none, their customs and arts are misleading, their religions misunderstood, their languages alone remain to testify to a oneness of blood often seemingly repudiated by an internecine hostility.

I am well aware of the limits which a wise caution assigns to the employment of linguistics in ethnology, and I am only too familiar with the many foolish, unscientific attempts to employ it with reference to the American race. But in spite of all this, I repeat that it is the surest and almost our only means to trace the ancient connection and migrations of nations in America.

Through its aid alone we have reached a positive knowledge that most of the area of South America, including the whole of the West Indies, was occupied by three great families of nations, not one of which had formed any important settlement on the northern continent. By similar evidence we know that the tribe which greeted Penn, when he landed on the site of this city where I now speak, was a member of one vast family,—the great Algonkin stock,—whose various clans extended from the palmetto swamps of Carolina to the snow-clad hills of Labrador, and from the easternmost cape of Newfoundland to the peaks of the Rocky Mountains, over 20° of latitude and 50° of longitude. We also know that the general trend of migration in the northern continent has been from north to south, and that this is true not only of the more savage tribes, as the Algonkins, Iroquois, and Athapascas, but also of those who, in the favored southern lands, approached a form of civilization, the Aztecs, the Mayas, and the Quiche. These and many minor ethnologic facts have already been obtained by the study of American languages.

But such external information is only a small part of what they are capable of disclosing. We can turn them, like the reflector of a microscope, on the secret and hidden mysteries of the aboriginal man, and discover his inmost motives, his impulses, his concealed hopes and fears, those that gave rise to his customs and laws, his schemes of social life, his superstitions and his religions.

The life-work of that eminent antiquary, the late Mr. Lewis H. Morgan, was based entirely on linguistics. He attempted, by an exhaustive analysis of the terms of relationship in American tribes, to reconstruct their primitive

theory of the social compact, and to extend this to the framework of ancient society in general. If, like most students enamored of an idea, he carried its application too far, the many correct results he obtained will ever remain as prized possessions of American ethnology.

Personal names, family names, titles, forms of salutation, methods of address, terms of endearment, respect, and reproach, words expressing the emotions, these are what infallibly reveal the daily social family life of a community, and the way in which its members regard one another. They are precisely as correct when applied to the investigation of the American race as elsewhere, and they are the more valuable just there, because his deep-seated distrust of the white invaders—for which, let us acknowledge, he had abundant cause—led the Indian to practise concealment and equivocation on these personal topics.

In no other way can the history of the development of his arts be reached. You are doubtless aware that diligent students of the Aryan languages have succeeded in faithfully depicting the arts and habits of that ancient community in which the common ancestors of Greek and Roman, Persian and Dane, Brahmin and Irishman dwelt together as of one blood and one speech. This has been done by ascertaining what household words are common to all these tongues, and therefore must have been in use among the primeval horde from which they are all descended. The method is conclusive, and yields positive results. There is no reason why it should not be addressed to American languages, and we may be sure that it would be most fruitful. How valuable it would be to take even a few words, as maize, tobacco, pipe, bow, arrow, and the like, each representing a widespread art or custom, and trace their derivations and affinities through the languages of the whole continent! We may be sure that striking and unexpected results would be obtained.

Similar lines of research suggest themselves in other directions. You all know what a fuss has lately been made about the great Pyramid as designed to preserve the linear

measure of the ancient Egyptians. The ascertaining of such measures is certainly a valuable historical point, as all artistic advance depends upon the use of instruments of precision. Mathematical methods have been applied to American architectural remains for the same purpose. But the study of words of measurement and their origin is an efficient auxiliary. By comparing such in the languages of three architectural people, the Aztecs of Mexico, the Mayas of Yucatan, and the Cakchiquel of Guatemala, I have found that the latter used the span and the two former the foot, and that this foot was just about one-fiftieth less than the ordinary foot of our standard. Certainly this is a useful result.

I have made some collections for a study of a different character. Of all the traits of a nation, the most decisive on its social life and destiny is the estimate it places upon women,—that is, upon the relation of the sexes. This is faithfully mirrored in language; and by collecting and analyzing all words expressing the sexual relations, all salutations of men to women and women to men, all peculiarities of the diction of each, we can ascertain far more exactly than by any mere description of usages what were the feelings which existed between them. Did they know love as something else than lust? Were the pre-eminently civilizing traits of the feminine nature recognized and allowed room for action? These are crucial questions, and their answer is contained in the spoken language of every tribe.

Nowhere, however, is an analytic scrutiny of words more essential than in comparative mythology. It alone enables us to reach the meaning of rites, the foundations of myths, the covert import of symbols. It is useless for any one to write about the religion of an American tribe who has not prepared himself by a study of its language, and acquainted himself with the applications of linguistics to mythology. Very few have taken this trouble, and the result is that all the current ideas on this subject are entirely erroneous. We hear about a Good Spirit and a Bad Spirit, about polytheism, fetichism, and animism, about sun worship and

serpent worship, and the like. No tribe worshipped a Good and a Bad Spirit, and the other vague terms I have quoted do not at all express the sentiment manifested in the native religious exercises. What this was we can satisfactorily ascertain by analyzing the names applied to their divinities, the epithets they use in their prayers and invocations, and the primitive sense of words which have become obscured by alterations of sounds.

A singular example of the last is presented by the tribes to whom I have already referred as occupying this area,—the Algonkins. Wherever they were met, whether far up in Canada, along the shores of Lake Superior, on the banks of the Delaware, by the Virginia streams, or in the pine woods of Maine, they always had a tale to tell of the Great Hare, the wonderful Rabbit which in times long ago created the world, became the father of the race, taught his children the arts of life and the chase, and still lives somewhere far to the East where the sun rises. What debasing animal worship! you will say, and so many others have said. Not at all. It is a simple result of verbal ambiguity. The word for rabbit in Algonkin is almost identical with that for *light*, and when these savages applied this word to their divinity, they agreed with him who said, “God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all.”

These languages offer also an entertaining field to the psychologist.

On account of their transparency, as I may call it, the clearness with which they retain the primitive forms of their radicals, they allow us to trace out the growth of words, and thus reveal the operations of the native mind by a series of witnesses whose testimony cannot be questioned. Often curious associations of ideas are thus disclosed, very instructive to the student of mankind. Many illustrations of this could be given, but I do not wish to assail your ears by a host of unknown sounds, so I will content myself with one, and that taken from the language of the Lenāpé, or Delaware Indians, who, as you know, lived where we now are.

I will endeavor to trace out one single radical in that language, and show you how many, and how strangely diverse ideas were built up upon it.

The radical which I select is the personal pronoun of the first person, *I*, Latin *Ego*. In Delaware this is a single syllable, a slight nasal, *Ně*, or *Ni*.

Let me premise by informing you that this is both a personal and a possessive pronoun; it means both *I* and *mine*. It is also both singular and plural, both *I* and *we*, *mine* and *our*.

The changes of the application of this root are made by adding suffixes to it.

I begin with *ni'hillan*, literally, "mine, it is so," or "she, it, is truly mine," the accent being on the first syllable, *ni'*, mine. But the common meaning of this verb in Delaware is more significant of ownership than this tame expression. It is an active animate verb, and means "I beat, or strike, somebody." To the rude minds of the framers of that tongue, ownership meant the right to beat what one owned.

We might hope this sense was confined to the lower animals; but not so. Change the accent from the first to the second syllable, *ni'hillan*, to *nihil'lan*, and you have the animate active verb with an intensive force, which signifies "to beat to death," "to kill some person;" and from this, by another suffix, you have *nihil'lowen*, to murder, and *nihil'lowet*, murderer. The bad sense of the root is here pushed to its uttermost.

But the root also developed in a nobler direction. Add to *ni'hillan* the termination *ape*, which means a male, and you have *nihillape*, literally, "I, it is true, a man," which, as an adjective, means free, independent, one's own master, "I am my own man." From this are derived the noun, *nihillapewit*, a freeman; the verb, *nihillapewin*, to be free; and the abstract, *nihillasowagan*, freedom, liberty, independence. These are glorious words; but I can go even farther. From this same theme is derived the verb *nihillape-wheu*, to set free, to liberate, to redeem; and from this the missionaries framed the word *nihillape-whoalid*, the Redeemer, the Saviour.

Here is an unexpected antithesis, the words for a murderer and the Saviour both from one root! It illustrates how strange is the concatenation of human thoughts.

These are by no means all the derivatives from the root *ni*, I.

When reduplicated as *něně*, it has a plural and strengthened form, like "our own." With a pardonable and well-nigh universal weakness, which we share with them, the nation who spoke that language believed themselves the first created of mortals and the most favored by the Creator. Hence whatever they designated as "ours" was both older and better than others of its kind. Hence *nenni* came to mean ancient, primordial, indigenous, and as such it is a frequent prefix in the Delaware language. Again, as they considered themselves the first and only true men, others being barbarians, enemies, or strangers, *nenno* was understood to be one of us, a man like ourselves, of our nation.

In their different dialects the sounds of *n*, *l*, and *r* were alternated, so that while Thomas Campanius, who translated the Catechism into Delaware about 1645, wrote that word *rhennus*, later writers have given it *lenno*, and translate it "man." This is the word which we find in the name Lenni Lenape, which, by its derivation, means "we, we men." The antecedent *lenni* is superfluous. The proper name of the Delaware nation was and still is *Len âpé*, "we men," or "our men," and those critics who have maintained that this was a misnomer, introduced by Mr. Heckewelder, have been mistaken in their facts.

I have not done with the root *ně*. I might go on and show you how it is at the base of the demonstrative pronouns, this, that, those, in Delaware; how it is the radical of the words for thinking, reflecting, and meditating; how it also gives rise to words expressing similarity and identity; how it means to be foremost, to stand ahead of others; and finally, how it signifies to come to me, to unify or congregate together. But doubtless I have trespassed on your ears long enough with unfamiliar words.

Such suggestions as these will give you some idea of the value of American languages to American ethnology. But I should be doing injustice to my subject were I to confine my arguments in favor of their study to this horizon. If they are essential to a comprehension of the red race, not less so are they to the science of linguistics in general. This science deals not with languages, but with *language*. It looks at the idiom of a nation, not as a dry catalogue of words and grammatical rules, but as the living expression of the thinking power of man, as the highest manifestation of that spiritual energy which has lifted him from the level of the brute, the complete definition of which, in its origin and evolution, is the loftiest aim of universal history. As the intention of all speech is the expression of thought, and as the final purpose of all thinking is the discovery of truth, so the ideal of language, the point toward which it strives, is the absolute form for the realization of intellectual function.

In this high quest no tongue can be overlooked, none can be left out of account. One is just as important as another. Goethe once said that he who knows but one language knows none; we may extend the apothegm, and say that so long as there is a single language on the globe not understood and analyzed, the science of language will be incomplete and illusory. It has often proved the case that the investigation of a single, narrow, obscure dialect has changed the most important theories of history. What has done more than anything else to overthrow, or, at least, seriously to shake, the time-honored notion that the White Race first came from Central Asia? It was the study of the Lithuanian dialect on the Baltic Sea, a language of peasants, without literature or culture, but which displays forms more archaic than the Sanscrit. What has led to a complete change of views as to the prehistoric population of Southern Europe? The study of the Basque, a language unknown out of a few secluded valleys in the Pyrenees.

There are many reasons why unwritten languages, like those of America, are more interesting, more promising in results, to the student of linguistics than those which for

generations have been cast in the conventional moulds of written speech.

Their structure is more direct, simple, transparent; they reveal more clearly the laws of the linguistic powers in their daily exercise; they are less tied down to hereditary formulæ and meaningless repetitions.

Would we explain the complicated structure of highly-organized tongues like our own, would we learn the laws which have assigned to it its material and formal elements, we must turn to the naïve speech of savages, there to see in their nakedness those processes which are too obscure in our own.

If the much-debated question of the origin of language engages us, we must seek its solution in the simple radicals of savage idioms; and if we wish to institute a comparison between the relative powers of languages, we can by no means omit them from our list. They offer to us the raw material, the essential and indispensable requisites of articulate communication.

As the structure of a language reflects in a measure, and as, on the other hand, it in a measure controls and directs the mental workings of those who speak it, the student of psychology must occupy himself with the speech of the most illiterate races in order to understand their theory of things, their notions of what is about them. They teach him the undisturbed evolution of the untrained mind.

As the biologist in pursuit of that marvellous something which we call "the vital principle" turns from the complex organisms of the higher animals and plants to life in its simplest expression in microbes and single cells, so in the future will the linguist find that he is nearest the solution of the most weighty problems of his science when he directs his attention to the least cultivated languages.

Convinced as I am of the correctness of this analogy, I venture to predict that in the future the analysis of the American languages will be regarded as one of the most important fields in linguistic study, and will modify most materially the findings of that science. And I make this

prediction the more confidently, as I am supported in it by the great authority of Wilhelm von Humboldt, who for twenty years devoted himself to their investigation.

As I am advocating so warmly that more attention should be devoted to these languages, it is but fair that you should require me to say something descriptive about them, to explain some of their peculiarities of structure. To do this properly I should require not the fag end of one lecture, but a whole course of lectures. Yet perhaps I can say enough now to show you how much there is in them worth studying.

Before I turn to this, however, I should like to combat a prejudice which I fear you may entertain. It is that same ancient prejudice which led the old Greeks to call all those who did not speak their sonorous idioms *barbarians*; for that word meant nothing more nor less than babblers (*βαλ-βαλοι*), people who spoke an unintelligible tongue. Modern civilized nations hold that prejudice yet, in the sense that each insists that its own language is the best one extant, the highest in the scale, and that wherein others differ from it in structure they are inferior.

So unfortunately placed is this prejudice with reference to my subject, that in the very volume issued by our government at Washington to encourage the study of the Indian languages, there is a long essay to prove that English is the noblest, most perfect language in the world, while all the native languages are, in comparison, of a very low grade indeed!

The essayist draws his arguments chiefly from the absence of inflections in English. Yet many of the profoundest linguists of this century have maintained that a fully inflected language, like the Greek or Latin, is for that very reason ahead of all others. We may suspect that when a writer lauds his native tongue at the expense of others, he is influenced by a prejudice in its favor and an absence of facility in the others.

Those best acquainted with American tongues praise them most highly for flexibility, accuracy, and resources of expression. They place some of them above any Aryan

language. But what is this to those who do not know them? To him who cannot bend the bow of Ulysses it naturally seems a useless and awkward weapon.

I do not ask you to accept this opinion either; but I do ask that you rid your minds of bias, and that you do not condemn a tongue because it differs widely from that which you speak.

American tongues do, indeed, differ very widely from those familiar to Aryan ears. Not that they are all alike in structure. That was a hasty generalization, dating from a time when they were less known. Yet the great majority of them have certain characteristics in common, sufficient to place them in a linguistic class by themselves. I shall name and explain some of these.

As of the first importance I would mention the prominence they assign to pronouns and pronominal forms. Indeed, an eminent linguist has been so impressed with this feature that he has proposed to classify them distinctively as "pronominal languages." They have many classes of pronouns, sometimes as many as eighteen, which is more than twice as many as the Greek. There is often no distinction between a noun and a verb other than the pronoun which governs it. That is, if a word is employed with one form of the pronoun it becomes a noun, if with another pronoun, it becomes a verb.

We have something of the same kind in English. In the phrase "I love," love is a verb; but in "my love," it is a noun. It is noteworthy that this treatment of words as either nouns or verbs, as we please to employ them, was carried further by Shakespeare than by any other English writer. He seemed to divine in such a trait of language vast resources for varied and pointed expression. If I may venture a suggestion as to how it does confer peculiar strength to expressions, it is that it brings into especial prominence the idea of Personality; it directs all subjects of discourse by the notion of an individual, a living, personal unit. This imparts vividness to narratives, and directness and life to propositions.

Of these pronouns, that of the first person is usually the most developed. From it, in many dialects, are derived the demonstratives and relatives, which in Aryan languages were taken from the third person. This prominence of the *Ego*, this confidence in self, is a trait of the race as well as of their speech. It forms part of that savage independence of character which prevented them coalescing into great nations, and led them to prefer death to servitude.

Another characteristic, which at one time was supposed to be universal on this continent, is what Mr. Peter S. Du Ponceau named *polysynthesis*. He meant by this a power of running several words into one, dropping parts of them and retaining only the significant syllables. Long descriptive names of all objects of civilized life new to the Indians were thus coined with the greatest ease. Some of these are curious enough. The Pavant Indians call a school-house by one word, which means "a stopping-place where sorcery is practised;" their notion of book-learning being that it belongs to the uncanny arts. The Delaware word for horse means "the four-footed animal which carries on his back."

This method of coining words is, however, by no means universal in American languages. It prevails in most of those in British America and the United States, in Aztec and various South American idioms; but in others, as the dialects found in Yucatan and Guatemala, and in the Tupi of Brazil, the Otomi of Mexico, and the Klamath of the Pacific coast, it is scarcely or not at all present.

Another trait, however, which was confounded with this by Mr. Du Ponceau, but really belongs in a different category of grammatical structure, is truly distinctive of the languages of the continent, and I am not sure that any one of them has been shown to be wholly devoid of it. This is what is called *incorporation*. It includes in the verb, or in the verbal expression, the object and manner of the action.

This is effected by making the subject of the verb an inseparable prefix, and by inserting between it and the verb itself, or sometimes directly in the latter, between its sylla-

bles, the object, direct or remote, and the particles indicating mode. The time or tense particles, on the other hand, will be placed at one end of this compound, either as prefixes or suffixes, thus placing the whole expression strictly within the limits of a verbal form of speech.

Both the above characteristics, I mean Polysynthesis and Incorporation, are unconscious efforts to carry out a certain theory of speech which has aptly enough been termed *holophrasis*, or the putting the whole of a phrase into a single word. This is the aim of each of them, though each endeavors to accomplish it by different means. Incorporation confines itself exclusively to verbal forms, while polysynthesis embraces both nouns and verbs.

Suppose we carry the analysis further, and see if we can obtain an answer to the query. Why did this effort at blending forms of speech obtain so widely? Such an inquiry will indicate how valuable to linguistic research would prove the study of this group of languages.

I think there is no doubt but that it points unmistakably to that very ancient, to that primordial period of human utterance when men had not yet learned to connect words into sentences, when their utmost efforts at articulate speech did not go beyond single words, which, aided by gestures and signs, served to convey their limited intellectual converse. Such single vocables did not belong to any particular part of speech. There was no grammar to that antique tongue. Its disconnected exclamations mean whole sentences in themselves.

A large part of the human race, notably, but not exclusively, the aborigines of this continent, continued the tradition of this mode of expression in the structure of their tongues long after the union of thought and sound in audible speech had been brought to a high degree of perfection.

Although I thus regard one of the most prominent peculiarities of American languages as a survival from an exceedingly low stage of human development, it by no means follows that this is an evidence of their inferiority.

The Chinese, who made no effort to combine the primitive vocables into one, but range them nakedly side by side, succeeded no better than the American Indians; and there is not much beyond assertion to prove that the Aryans, who, through their inflections, marked the relation of each word in the sentence by numerous tags of case, gender, number, etc., got any nearer the ideal perfection of language.

If we apply what is certainly a very fair test, to wit: the uses to which a language is and can be put, I cannot see that a well-developed American tongue, such as the Aztec or the Algonkin, in any way falls short of, say French or English.

It is true that in many of these tongues there is no distinction made between expressions, which with us are carefully separated, and are so in thought. Thus, in the Tupi of Brazil and elsewhere, there is but one word for the three expressions, "his father," "he is a father," and "he has a father;" in many, the simple form of the verb may convey three different ideas, as in Ute, where the word for "he seizes" means also "the seizer," and as a descriptive noun, "a bear," the animal which seizes.

This has been charged against these languages as a lack of "differentiation." Grammatically this is so, but the same charge applies with almost equal force to the English language, where the same word may belong to any of four, five, even six parts of speech, dependent entirely on the connection in which it is used.

As a set-off, the American languages avoid confusions of expression which prevail in European tongues.

Thus in none of these latter, when I say "the love of God," "*P'amour de Dieu*," "*amor Dei*," can you understand what I mean. You do not know whether I intend the love which we have or should have toward God, or God's love toward us. Yet in the Mexican language (and many other American tongues) these two quite opposite ideas are so clearly distinguished that, as Father Carocho warns his readers in his Mexican Grammar, to confound

them would not merely be a grievous solecism in speech, but a formidable heresy as well.

Another example. What can you make out of this sentence, which is strictly correct by English grammar: "John told Robert's son that he must help him"? You can make nothing out of it. It may have any one of six different meanings, depending on the persons referred to by the pronouns "he" and "him." No such lamentable confusion could occur in any American tongue known to me. The Chippeway, for instance, has three pronouns of the third person, which designate the near and the remote antecedents with the most lucid accuracy.

There is another point that I must mention in this connection, because I find that it has almost always been overlooked or misunderstood by critics of these languages. These have been free in condemning the synthetic forms of construction. But they seem to be ignorant that their use is largely optional. Thus, in Mexican, one can arrange the same sentence in an analytic or a synthetic form, and this is also the case, in a less degree, in the Algonkin. By this means a remarkable richness is added to the language. The higher the grade of synthesis employed, the more striking, elevated, and pointed becomes the expression. In common life long compounds are rare, while in the native Mexican poetry each line is often but one word.

Turning now from the structure of these languages to their vocabularies, I must correct a widespread notion that they are scanty in extent and deficient in the means to express lofty or abstract ideas.

Of course, there are many tracts of thought and learning familiar to us now which were utterly unknown to the American aborigines, and not less so to our own forefathers a few centuries ago. It would be very unfair to compare the dictionary of an Indian language with the last edition of Webster's Unabridged. But take the English dictionaries of the latter half of the sixteenth century, before Spenser and Shakespeare wrote, and compare them with the Mexican vocabulary of Molina, which contains about

13,000 words, or with the Maya vocabulary of the convent of Motul, which presents over 20,000, both prepared at that date, and your procedure will be just, and you will find it not disadvantageous to the American side of the question.

The deficiency in abstract terms is generally true of these languages. They did not have them, because they had no use for them,—and the more blessed was their condition. European languages have been loaded with several thousand such by metaphysics and mysticism, and it has required several generations to discover that they are empty wind-bags, full of sound and signifying nothing.

Yet it is well known to students that the power of forming abstracts is possessed in a remarkable degree by many native languages. The most recondite formulæ of dogmatic religion, such as the definition of the Trinity and the difference between consubstantiation and transubstantiation, have been translated into many of them without introducing foreign words, and in entire conformity with their grammatical structure. Indeed, Dr. Augustin de la Rosa, of the University of Guadalajara, who is now the only living professor of any American language, says the Mexican is peculiarly adapted to render these metaphysical subtleties.

I have been astonished that some writers should bring up the primary meaning of a word in an American language in order to infer the coarseness of its secondary meaning. This is a strangely unfair proceeding, and could be directed with equal effect against our own tongues. Thus, I read lately a traveller who spoke hardly of an Indian tribe because their word for “to love” was a derivative from that meaning “to buy,” and thence “to prize.” But what did the Latin *amare*, and the English *to love*, first mean? Carnally living together is what they first meant, and this is not a nobler derivation than that of the Indian. Even yet, when the most polished of European nations, that one which most exalts *la grande passion*, does not distinguish in language between loving their wives and liking their diners, but uses the same word for both emotions, it is scarcely

wise for us to indulge in much latitude of inference from such etymologies.

Such is the general character of American languages, and such are the reasons why they should be preserved and studied. The field is vast and demands many laborers to reap all the fruit that it promises. It is believed at present that there are about two hundred wholly independent stocks of languages among the aborigines of this continent. They vary most widely in vocabulary, and seemingly scarcely less so in grammar.

Besides this, each of these stocks is subdivided into dialects, each distinguished by its own series of phonetic changes, and its own new words. What an opportunity is thus offered for the study of the natural evolution of language, unfettered by the petrifying art of writing!

In addition to these native dialects there are the various jargons which have sprung up by intercourse with the Spanish, English, Dutch, Portuguese, and French settlers. These are by no means undeserving of notice. They reveal in an instructive manner the laws of the influence which is exerted on one another by languages of radically different formations. A German linguist of eminence, Prof. Schuchardt, of Gratz, has for years devoted himself to the study of the mixed languages of the globe, and his results promise to be of the first order of importance for linguistic science. In America we find examples of such in the Chinook jargon of the Pacific coast, the Jarocho of Mexico, the "Maya mestizado" of Yucatan, the ordinary Lingoa Geral of Brazil, and the Nahuatl-Spanish of Nicaragua, in which last mentioned jargon, a curious medley of Mexican and low Spanish, I have lately published a comedy as written and acted by the natives and half-castes of that country.

All such macaroni dialects must come into consideration, if we wish to make a full representation of the linguistic riches of this continent.

What now is doing to collect, collate, and digest this vast material? We may cast our eyes over the civilized world and count upon our fingers the names of those who are

engaged in really serviceable and earnest work in this department.

In Germany, the land of scholars, we have the traveller von Tschudi, who has lately published a most excellent volume on the Qquichua of Peru; Dr. Stoll, of Zurich, who is making a specialty of the languages of Guatemala; Mr. Julius Platzmann, who has reprinted a number of rare works; Prof. Friederich Müller, of Vienna; but I know of no other name to mention. In France, an enlightened interest in the subject has been kept alive by the creditable labors of the Count de Charencey, M. Lucien Adam, and a few other students; while the series of American grammars and dictionaries published by Maisonneuve, and that edited by Alphonse Pinart, are most commendable monuments of industry. In Italy, the natal soil of Columbus, in Spain, so long the mistress of the Indies, and in England, the mother of the bold navigators who explored the coasts of the New World, I know not a single person who gives his chief interest to this pursuit.

Would that I could place in sharp contrast to this the state of American linguistics in our own country! But outside of the official investigators appointed by the Government Bureau of Ethnology, who merit the highest praise in their several departments, but who are necessarily confined to their assigned fields of study, the list is regretfully brief.

There is first the honored name of Dr. John Gilmary Shea. It is a discredit to this country that his "Library of American Linguistics" was forced to suspend publication for lack of support. There is Mr. Horatio Hale, who forty years ago prepared the "Philology of the United States Exploring Expedition," and who, "obeying the voice at eve obeyed at prime," has within the last two years contributed to American philology some of the most suggestive studies which have anywhere appeared. Nor must I omit Dr. J. Hammond Trumbull, whose Algonkin studies are marked by the truest scientific spirit, and the works on special dialects of Dr. Washington Matthews, the Abbé Cuoq, and others.

Whatever these worthy students have done, has been prompted solely by a love of the subject and an appreciation of its scientific value. They have worked without reward or the hope of reward, without external stimulus, and almost without recognition.

Not an institution of the higher education in this land has an instructor in this branch; not one of our learned societies has offered inducements for its study; no enlightened patron of science of the many which honor our nation has ever held out that encouragement which is needed by the scholar who would devote himself to it.

In conclusion, I appeal to you, and through you to all the historical societies of the United States, to aid in removing this reproach from American scholarship. Shall we have fellowships and professorships in abundance for the teaching of the dead languages and dead religions of another hemisphere, and not one for instruction in those tongues of our own land, which live in a thousand proper names around us, whose words we repeat daily, and whose structure is as important to the philosophic study of speech as any of the dialects of Greece or India?

What is wanted is by offering prizes for essays in this branch, by having one or more instructors in it at our great universities, and by providing the funds for editing and publishing the materials for studying the aboriginal languages, to awaken a wider interest in them, at the same time that the means is furnished wherewith to gratify and extend this interest.

This is the case which I present to you, and for which I earnestly solicit your consideration. And that I may add weight to my appeal, I close by quoting the words of one of America's most distinguished scientists, Professor William Dwight Whitney, of Yale College, who writes to this effect:

“The study of American languages is the most fruitful and the most important branch of American Archæology.”

282

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 029 037 433.9